

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1     1.     A method of providing online presence information:  
2             maintaining a list of people known to a user;  
3             accessing online presence information for the user;  
4             determining a potential receiver of the online presence information;  
5             comparing the potential receiver to the maintained list to determine if the potential  
6             receiver is included on the list; and  
7             determining whether to communicate the online presence information to the potential  
8             receiver based on whether the potential receiver is included in the list.
- 1     2.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2             presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining to not communicate  
3             the online presence information to the potential receiver when the potential receiver is not  
4             included in the list.
- 1     3.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2             presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining whether to  
3             communicate the online presence information to an instant messaging application of the  
4             potential receiver.
- 1     4.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2             presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining whether to display  
3             the online presence information on a web page.
- 1     5.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2             presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining whether to display  
3             the online presence information in member search results.
- 1     6.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2             presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining whether to display  
3             the online presence information in a member profile.

1     7.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2         presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining whether to  
3         communicate the online presence information to the potential receiver when a request for  
4         online presence information is received from the potential receiver.

1     8.     The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether to communicate the online  
2         presence information to the potential receiver comprises determining whether to  
3         communicate the online presence information to the potential receiver absent a request  
4         from the potential receiver for the online presence information.

1     9.     The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
2         inferring that a person is known to the user based on positive user actions related to e-  
3         mail communications from the person;  
4         adding the inferred person to the list.

1     10.    The method of claim 9 wherein the positive actions include sending an e-mail to the  
2         person.

1     11.    The method of claim 9 wherein the positive actions include replying to, forwarding,  
2         saving, or printing an e-mail received from the person.

1     12.    The method of claim 9 wherein the positive actions include moving an e-mail from a  
2         first folder to a second folder.

1     13.    The method of claim 12 wherein the first folder is an inbox folder and the second  
2         folder is a folder other than a delete folder or a spam folder.

1     14.    The method of claim 9 wherein the positive action includes leaving an e-mail from  
2         the person open for a predetermined period of time.

1     15.    The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
2         inferring that a person is known to the user based, at least in part, on detecting a

3 communication between the user and the person;  
4 adding the inferred person to the list.

1 16. The method of claim 15 wherein the communication is an instant messaging  
2 communication.

1 17. The method of claim 1 further comprising inferring that a person is known to the  
2 user, wherein inferring comprises:  
3 accessing a contact list of the user to determine a first contact on the user's contact  
4 list; and  
5 accessing a contact list of the first contact to determine a second contact on the first  
6 contact's contact list.

1 18. The method of claim 1 further comprising inferring that a person is known to the user  
2 based, at least in part, on detecting user actions that mitigate against factors that  
3 otherwise are used to infer a person is known to the user.

1 19. The method of claim 18 wherein the user actions comprise the user taking steps to  
2 report a communication from the person as spam.

1 20. The method of claim 18 wherein the user actions comprise the user taking steps to  
2 add a person to a blacklist.

1 21. The method of claim 18 wherein the user actions comprise the user taking steps to  
2 move a communication from the person to either of a spam folder or a delete folder.

1 22. The method of claim 1 further comprising:  
2 enabling the user to expressly designate a person as known to the user; and  
3 adding the designated person to the list.

1 23. A computer-usable medium having a computer program embodied thereon for  
2 providing online presence information, the computer program comprising instructions for  
3 causing a computer to perform the following operations:

4 maintain a list of people known to a user;  
5 access online presence information for the user;  
6 determine a potential receiver of the online presence information;  
7 compare the potential receiver to the maintained list to determine if the potential  
8 receiver is included on the list; and  
9 determine whether to communicate the online presence information to the potential  
10 receiver based on whether the potential receiver is included in the list.

1 24. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises  
3 instructions for causing the computer to determine to not communicate the online  
4 presence information to the potential receiver when the potential receiver is not included  
5 in the list.

1 25. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises  
3 instructions for causing the computer to determine whether to communicate the online  
4 presence information to an instant messaging application of the potential receiver.

1 26. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises  
3 instructions for causing the computer to determine whether to display the online presence  
4 information on a web page.

1 27. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises  
3 instructions for causing the computer to determine whether to display the online presence  
4 information in member search results.

1 28. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises

3 instructions for causing the computer to determine whether to display the online presence  
4 information in a member profile.

1 29. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises  
3 instructions for causing the computer to determine whether to communicate the online  
4 presence information to the potential receiver when a request for online presence  
5 information is received from the potential receiver.

1 30. The medium of claim 23 wherein, to determine whether to communicate the online  
2 presence information to the potential receiver, the computer program further comprises  
3 instructions for causing the computer to determine whether to communicate the online  
4 presence information to the potential receiver absent a request from the potential receiver  
5 for the online presence information.

1 31. The medium of claim 23 wherein the computer program further comprises  
2 instructions for causing the computer to:  
3 infer that a person is known to the user based on positive user actions related to e-  
4 mail communications from the person;  
5 add the inferred person to the list.

1 32. The medium of claim 31 wherein the positive actions include sending an e-mail to the  
2 person.

1 33. The medium of claim 31 wherein the positive actions include replying to, forwarding,  
2 saving, or printing an e-mail received from the person.

1 34. The medium of claim 31 wherein the positive actions include moving an e-mail from  
2 a first folder to a second folder.

1 35. The medium of claim 34 wherein the first folder is an inbox folder and the second  
2 folder is a folder other than a delete folder or a spam folder.

1 36. The medium of claim 31 wherein the positive action includes leaving an e-mail from  
2 the person open for a predetermined period of time.

1 37. The medium of claim 23 wherein the computer program further comprises  
2 instructions for causing the computer to:  
3 inferring that a person is known to the user based, at least in part, on detecting a  
4 communication between the user and the person;  
5 adding the inferred person to the list.

1 38. The medium of claim 37 wherein the communication is an instant messaging  
2 communication.

1 39. The medium of claim 23 wherein the computer program further comprises  
2 instructions for causing the computer to infer that a person is known to the user and  
3 wherein, to infer that a person is known to the user the computer program further  
4 comprises instructions for causing the computer to:  
5 access a contact list of the user to determine a first contact on the user's contact list;  
6 and  
7 access a contact list of the first contact to determine a second contact on the first  
8 contact's contact list.

1 40. The medium of claim 23 wherein the computer program further comprises  
2 instructions for causing the computer to infer that a person is known to the user based, at  
3 least in part, on detecting user actions that mitigate against factors that otherwise are used  
4 to infer a person is known to the user.

1 41. The medium of claim 40 wherein the user actions comprise the user taking steps to  
2 report a communication from the person as spam.

1 42. The medium of claim 40 wherein the user actions comprise the user taking steps to  
2 add a person to a blacklist.

1     43.     The medium of claim 40 wherein the user actions comprise the user taking steps to  
2             move a communication from the person to either of a spam folder or a delete folder.

1     44.     The medium of claim 23 wherein the computer program further comprises  
2             instructions for causing the computer to:  
3             enable the user to expressly designate a person as known to the user; and  
4             add the designated person to the list.

1     45.     An apparatus for providing online presence information:  
2             means for maintaining a list of people known to a user;  
3             means for accessing online presence information for the user;  
4             means for determining a potential receiver of the online presence information;  
5             means for comparing the potential receiver to the maintained list to determine if the  
6             potential receiver is included on the list; and  
7             means for determining whether to communicate the online presence information to  
8             the potential receiver based on whether the potential receiver is included in the list.